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771 openly hostile to the old religious system. If people will take trouble and spend money on a religion disestablished and scorned by their rulers, it can only be because they believe in it.

The explanation of this paradox lies in a misunderstanding of the Chinese (and Min Chia) approach to a religious rite, and the nature of the idea of what is sacred to the European, and to the Chinese. To the West, whether Christian, Moslem or Hebrew, and one may add Hindu, the Church or other place of worship is itself sacred, the house of God, where men meet only to worship the deity in a communal rite. This idea is wholly absent from the Far East. To these peoples religion is essentially not a communal, but a personal, or at most a family affair. The most important rites take place, not in any public temple but in the privacy of the home. The temples of the gods are monuments of piety,
• 793 built to please, not to house, the deities. Thus the Buddhist
791 "priest" is wrongly described, for he is is not the father of a flock, nor a sacred person knowing more about the gods and how to serve them than a layman. He is at best a monk self-vowed to a life of abstention in order that he may be reborn nearer to Nirvana, and he is also a technician who can be called upon to perform wearisome rites for which the layman has neither time nor inclination. At a funeral, or in sickness, the Buddhist monks are called in to chant sutras, for a fee, just as the doctor is called in to prescribe.

791 There is no communal worship at a temple by the laity.
782 Men and women go to the festivals to burn incense and offer a cash at the shrines of the gods, individually, to acquire merit, avoid ill fortune, or in fulfilment of a vow given in time of sickness. At other times, if they visit a temple, they do not feel called upon to behave in any but the ordinary way.

771 As a practical working system the religion of the Min Chia

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783 arise with the need or the occasion or the mood of the person offering. But in public or private worship there are extraordinary times when both are conducted on an extended or greater scale.

Public worship takes place in the sacred grove, and each village or set of villages has one of its own. Private worship begins on the house top with sacrifice and is continued in the home below.

793 783 In all worship a priest invariably officiates. He is essential to its proper conduct. An ordinary individual dare not take the honour on himself of presenting the blood of sacrifice: that is the prerogative of the priest set apart for the purpose. He it is who superintends the whole ritual, checking error, enforcing decorum, explaining its necessity and significance, and leading in the prayers made after the sacrifice.

The office is generally handed down from father to son. One generation initiates another. When the pupil is proficient in the knowledge of the nature and significance of the various rites he will be called on to perform, he undergoes a careful ordination. But he must be able to get married, and the marriage ceremony may be the closing act in the ordination. Single men cannot act as priests, lest taint or auspicion should rest on any one performing this holy office.

The ordination takes place in the grove. For the ceremony all the priests in the neighbourhood assemble. In company with any laity who desire to attend they form a procession that starts up the hillside as dusk draws on. Along the route fowls are sacrificed one after another to ensure a continuous dripping of blood from the start to the finish. Immediately the blood ceases to drip from one fowl it is thrown aside and another killed to maintain the cleansing of the path of the novitiates. It is a strange performance doubtless, only it sets forth in no uncertain way the emphasis that is laid on blood, and hence calculated to make men think of its necessary meaning even while it serves as a shock or challenge to man's aesthetic sense. Which same thing also the Jewish ritual continually did.

On the mountain the probationer bathes in a stream to rid himself of all bodily defilement and dresses himself in cleansed garments. A lamb on the altar is sacrificed in the usual way. The blood is sprinkled on the White Stone, the Sacred Tree, The Altar and all around. Oil or fat is put on the new priests head and the night-long chantings, prayers and drum beatings varied by intervals of rest proceed.

Next day each new priest has a lamb sacrificed on his house-top in front of the White Stone and Sacred Branch. At the conclusion of the accompanying prayers he may don the priestly garments and wear the priest's hat. He is now officially recognised as competent to undertake all sacerdotal duties connected with his office, whether in public or in private offerings.

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As a priest there is one thing he must not do: he must not change the intention of the sacrifice. Sacrifice may only be made for the one express and divinely ordained purpose of the remission of sin. It can not be turned aside to any other or made to any one but God. His duty is to maintain and enforce this original end, or otherwise he renders himself liable to the penalty of death.

We confess that the first time a priest voluntarily gave us this information we were surprised to the point of wonder, yea, and of admiration. For it revealed to us the intensity of their great central belief that their sacrifices of propitiation were not man-invented but God-born.

Everywhere the same insistence is made on the due order. Their chantings and prayers include an avowal of faithfulness in this respect. God is invoked to remember that the blood of the sacrifice is presented by his set command as made known to their fathers. Simultaneously the ancient priests are cited as witnesses that they have been stedfast to the rule of faith handed down by them.

Once at a High-place sacrifice, friction which arose among the worshippers led to certain irregularities and lack of reverence in the making of the offering, That same year, men noticed that death claimed the majority of the wanton offenders. This may have been a coincidence, of course, but the reason believed was because they sinned with a high hand.

But the surprise created by the staunchness of the Chiang to the faith of their fathers leads to a distinct shock when it is seen that the priests have allowed strange accretions and realistic amplifications to creep into parts of their ritual and profession which degrade its pristine purity. For instance the skull in the sacred roll obviously is an innovation to give it a dramatic presentation. The horned skin cap of the priest is declared to have replaced by a plain shaped felt one with a circular brim. And a number of priests, not all, have copied some of the customs of the Chinese exorcist. Worst of all, spiritism, in some parts with its customary admixture of real phenomenae and base trickery, has crept in. The investigator, even while he laments these excesses, has to take note of them. All is not pure gold that glitters. There may an alloy in it or it may be a base metal of the same colour. One has to distinguish and care is needed at every turn. Patience and caution are often necessary to disentangle the real from the simulation and what constitutes the old true-Chiang religion from its present day admixture of spurious elements.

It has to be remembered that during the reign of the Emperor Chien Long, A. D. 1736-1796 the Chiang suffered complete loss of political liberty. Then idolatry was forced on them at the point of the sword. Temples, never before seen on their mountain sides and plateaus, were wantonly built all through their territory. Since then a slow decadence has been noted in their worship. The

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old zeal and fire have insensibly diminished. Even in the present generation we ourselves have watched this decline make definite progress. Old priests from whom we learnt much of what is here given have died off, and their successors, while performing the motions of the ritual, have not shown half the knowledge of its inner meaning their sires did. Their surroundings have not lent them the inspiration they required to maintain the old time brilliancy of their religion.

With regard to the spiritism adopted in some quarters, the young priests are alleged to pass through a trance at their initiation. A spirit then is supposed to possess them, taking complete possession for the time being of their faculties. After this possession is over they are physically limp or half-exhausted until their strength is regained.

On the other hand, it is alleged that this is not always the case. The possession by the spirit is not real but simulated. An old priest instructs them how to feign the usual phenomena so that their reputation should not come behind others in having authority over occult powers.

Such as do have real experience with spirits profess to be able to call up these unseen personalities at will. By ways known to themselves they secure their aid or release from harmful influences. After a death, if the priest be up to his job, the spirit can lead back the departed soul under leash to his old home for a visit in a manner similar to the way shown in street processions of the actors of the Buddhist temple of hell.

In one district the priests carry, hung from their girdles, a bunch of ludicrously weird objects called the *Te-sa-a-ga*. Anything that is curious or strange enough or suggestive may find a place in the collection. Together they make a rare rattle for the ignorant and the gullible. You may see an eagle's bill, a cock's foot, a wild boar's tusk, a goat's horn, a bit of bone, a cymbal, deer's teeth, a Chinese charm cash, or a rare shell. Each object proclaims the exorcist powers of its possessor. With these by his side no one can doubt his ability to recall the soul in sickness, undo demoniac powers and save you in general from the evil eye.

Incidentally they prove a god-send to the sensationalist wiseacre. With these to shake in front of his audience, who dare doubt now that the Chiang are litholatrists, animists and demon worshippers! Seeing is believing? His case is proven. And he struts around as pleased with himself as the man who wears the lot at his belt.

He, however, who knows something of the genius of the beautiful old Chiang religion groans within himself at the sight of such things. How have the best become the worst? The *Te-sa-a-ga*, once pure as the morning light, has fallen from its high estate. We believe we hold the key to its primitive significance but must meanwhile wait before giving its solution. Sufficient here to say

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that the presence of these oddities and occult claims does not lessen our admiration for the better class of priests who despise the use of such fraudulent practices in their profession. They refuse to stoop to these mountebank tricks and schemes for the sake of gain but trust to the all-merciful power of a benign God to meet the ills and needs of men. To them God is very real.

Few priests to-day wear a distinctive dress. There used to be priestly sacrificial garments; there is one in the West China Union University Museum, which we procured for it. This one shows a kind of back-plate ornament which is peculiar. Of its significance we remain so far in entire ignorance and until we find a clue there is no use making a guess at it. Nowadays priests mostly perform their sacrificial duties clad in the common white robe of the worshippers.

At the sacrifice in the grove only men are allowed to attend. Mixed worship is forbidden. Distance is no excuse, and nothing save bodily infirmity may deter the heads of households from being present. Worship is congregational and not to take part makes one a religious reprobate.

Elders or leaders of good repute are appointed in turns to see to all the necessary arrangements. It falls to them to select the ram or he-goat. This is done ten days ahead of time. It must be perfect in every part, body, legs and horns. And it must be white. If a wholly white animal cannot be found, a white cock is offered to atone for any spot or imperfection in colour. It is led home the day before and washed. To augment its cleansing it is next bathed in incense which is of cypress twigs. Then it is tethered in a clean place until wanted.

A new and unused rope is used to lead it to the altar. The rope, too, has to pass through the sanctifying fumes of the incense, and afterwards it may not be used for any profane purpose. A special honour rests on the person chosen to lead the victim to the grove. He is always some one reckoned worthy among his brethren. It falls to him to slay the sacrifice, and he receives an extra portion of the divided meat.

Three days beforehand the worshippers cleanse their bodies, wash their clothes and make themselves ready. No pungeant herbs such as garlic or onions may be eaten then or anything regarded as unclean. Even smoking is meantime prohibited. If possible, all go clothed in white. The very poor may wear dyed garments if they are cleansed and they have no other.

The road along which the victim is led to the grove only the worshippers may tread. No others that day may appear thereon, for that day it is sacred. Should any one inadvertently be met on it he must offer a special sacrifice to make amends for his trespass.

No outsiders are permitted to witness the New Year sacrifice. No Chiang even who are not participants are allowed near. The roads and approaches to the grove are carefully guarded against

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4. Yi Mu Sei. She gives sons, protects women when they have conceived and during childbirth, and protects children. 776

5. Mya Wei Sei who protects men and boys.

6. Sti P'r Sei who protects women and girls in matters not connected with childbirth.

7. Do Dzu Sei a door god who is on the right side and keeps demons out of the homes.

8. Nu Nga Sei a door god on the left side who helps keep out demons.

9. She Pri Sei, the god of the bin who controls the five grains after they have been harvested and are in the house or in the bin.

10. Mo Bo Sei or Mu Bo Sei, the fire god who controls the fire in the home lest it burn up the house.

11. Abba Sei, the male ancestor.

12. Ata Sei, The female ancestor.

These are regarded as so distinctly Ch'iang gods that they are put into a different category than the Chinese gods whose images are worshipped in shrines, in homes and in temples. The pronunciation of the names of the gods as given above is that which was given us at Ta Ho P'in Chai, near Wen Ch'uan.

The above Ch'iang gods have no images.

There may be other gods that are regarded as Ch'iang, but at present we can not affirm it with certainty. Many Chinese gods, however, are commonly worshipped by the Ch'iang. Among them are the Pearly Emperor, Ch'uan Chu 川主, the Lord of Szechwan, Wang yeh 王爺 who is elsewhere the god of boatmen. The housegod 天地君親師位 meaning Heaven, Earth, Rulers, Relatives, Scholars, the T'ai Shan Shih Kan Tang 泰山石敢當, the T'u Ti 土地, Kuanyin, and many others. They are regarded by the Ch'iang as real, living deities.

4. The Priesthood.

The Ch'iang are a very reverent and devout people, and their religious ceremonies and rituals are considered to be very important. They must be performed with exactness and fitting decorum. Some of them are long. Since they have no written language their chants or songs, which they regard as the equivalents of sacred 793 538

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793 538 books, are taught by word of mouth, memorized and passed down from generation to generation, from father to son or from teacher to pupil. In Tung Men Wai and at P'u Wa the line has ceased and there is now no Ch'iang priest. There must be no incorrectness in the performances or in the repetitions. There is therefore a special priesthood who, however, are also farmers and have wives and children. They are important persons, highly respected in their communities, but they have no distinctive dress.

793 The priest officiates in all important ceremonies. At least that is the ancient custom. In localities where there are no priests, as at Tung Men Wai, the local people sometimes officiate, or a Taoist priest may be called to perform funeral ceremonies or to exorcise demons, since the Ch'iang priests are more expensive.

In most of the ceremonies performed to Mu Bya Sei on the housetops, the head of the house officiates. On special or most important occasions the Ch'iang priest is called in. Since he is an important person, whenever he officiates in such a ceremony he must be boarded and lodged, given meat or some other commodity, and there must be a special feast. Sometimes he must be paid money also. Since the priest has no special costume, he wears the white homespun garments such as are worn by all Ch'iang worshippers.

793 796 Priests are responsible for conducting sacred ceremonies that bring contact with and assistance from the gods. They have superhuman potency without which their work and ceremonials would not be efficacious. In 1933 a priest told the writer his ceremonial implements and stated that the reason he sold them and no longer acted as priest was that he had lost his efficacy.

When a priest has finished his course of instruction and is ready to begin his work as a priest, an ordination ceremony takes place. His face is ceremoniously washed with sacred water for purposes of purification. Incense, candles, and cedar twigs are burnt and a white cockerel is killed. After the ceremony, which takes place in the sacred grove, he takes his full responsibility as priest.

The priest, who in different localities is called bi bu (bi- bu-), bi bo or bi mu performs the following ceremonies;—

1. He conducts the worship of the great god or gods in the sacred grove on the first day of the sixth moon, or the first day of

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the eighth moon, or the first day of the tenth moon. He dances, beats his drum, and chants his "sacred books." 793 796

2. Since the souls of people that die violent deaths become demons, their bodies are cremated.

3. Demons are enticed by the priest into jars which are buried upside down on cross-roads or near the graves of the persons whose souls have become demons.

4. It is believed that if a man or a woman has pain in his bowels or chest this is caused by a demon. A ploughshare is heated white-hot, the priest chants and treads on the white-hot ploughshare with his foot, then treads on the stomach and chest of the patient, and waves the hot plough-share over the chest and stomach, and sometimes over the back, of the patient. This exorcises the demon. [755]

5 He divines to determine lucky days—for weddings, for beginning a journey, for starting to build a house, and many other things. Priests are supposed to have no books, but some priests have a book in which there is no writing, but there are many pictures. The twelve creatures of the zodiac occur several times in the book. This is a book for divination, and especially to determine lucky days. [787]

6. He conducts funerals.

7. At Mu Shang Chai the writer was told that the priest makes connections with the Earth Vein Dragon and with the Earth Mother and tells them to protect the deceased.

8. At Mu Shang Chai it was also stated that the priest ceremonially purifies the clothing of the deceased by incantations, smoke, etc., and that he informs the twelve gods of the decease.

9. He performs special ceremonies of worship on the housetops when requested to do so.

10. He performs special ceremonies on the housetops or in the sacred groves in performance of vows.

11. He ordains new priests.

12. He performs the ceremonies of setting up new gods in the homes.

The above list is probably not complete.

5. Sacred Implements.

The implements used by the priests in worship are sacred, and are to be handled with reverence. They are also naturally surcharg- 778